

Advising a Student:

A Collection of Two Essays That Analyze Supervisory Communication

An Honors Thesis (Comm 465)

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a collection of two essays: *Communicating Motivation to College Students: How Supervisory Communication Influences a Willingness to Volunteer* and *What is an Advisor? An Autoethnography of the Advising Styles in Student Government*. The first is a research proposal written with Max O. Browning documenting supervisory communication and its relationship with student motivation to volunteer. This document proposes both a quantitative and a qualitative study to analyze how much influence an advisor might have within an organization. The second document is a response to the introduction and literature review of the first, and although it is not the study proposed in the first essay, it seeks to continue the research needed in the field. In an autoethnography relating experiences with three separate advisors in one organization to the culture of the organization, the author reflects on the three advisors while also reflecting on herself and her future in student affairs.

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Fair Use of Research Prospectus

 Browning, Max Orman

Thu 4/28/2016 5:10 PM

Inbox

To: Mullen, Meagan R <mmullen@bsu.edu>;

Hello Meagan,

I give you full permission to include our co-written, communication research prospectus "Communicating Motivation to College Students: How Supervisory Communication Influences a Willingness to Volunteer." Your hard work on this project deserves to be credited in your Honors Thesis. I wish you the best of luck as you expound upon our ideas with anecdotes from your experiences within Ball State's Office of Student Life.

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Communicating Motivation to College Students:
How Supervisory Communication Influences a Willingness to Volunteer

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Abstract

In such a competitive world, it is imperative that college students take advantage of the opportunities provided to them, such as community service and student organizations.

Institutions--both academic and professional--are looking for candidates that can offer more than just a degree. However, with so many self-proclaimed "lazy" students, it can be difficult for them to gain the motivation for such beneficial activities. After a review of the literature, the authors discuss the potential for supervisory communication and its ability to motivate college students to volunteer for advancement.

RQ: Which supervisory communication strategies do students perceive as increasing their motivation to volunteer?

Hypothesis 1: Student motivation to volunteer will increase as supervisory communication conveys the relevance of volunteering.

This proposal introduces focus groups with a variety of students and faculty to investigate the research question and a survey sent to an array of students to test the hypothesis. These participants will come from three large, Midwestern universities and will be asked questions regarding supervisory communication and motivation to volunteer.

Communicating Motivation to College Students:

How Supervisory Communication Influences Willingness to Volunteer

The Odyssey is an online social content platform written by college students for college students. In Jacqueline Flood's satirical article "The Lazy College Student," she writes, "Let's be honest: we are all lazy. Some of us are more lazy than others... In college, life can be tough and we try to do the least amount of work possible; it's in our nature" (2015).

But at the same time, college students are busy. Between going to classes, studying for tests, working a job, staying active, socializing with friends, and making time to sleep, the average college student maintains a busy schedule. In a blog written by Gregg Henriques, Ph.D (2014), it is said that students in the year 2000 have similar anxiety levels as psychiatric patients in the 1950s. This means that students are stressing more now than ever before, with academics being encouraged by several variables. However, good grades are not enough to gain the attention of institutions.

Moreover, no longer is a degree seen as a ticket to employment. Employers are seeking qualified graduates with ample experience in the community. McGaha and Fitzpatrick (2010) analyzed the admission of students into college, and found that extracurricular activities were just as important in gaining attention of college admissions offices. Extracurriculars such as student organizations and community service gain attention of job recruiters. A study in the United Kingdom found that extracurricular activities make a difference in the job search after graduation: Those who were involved in extracurricular activities during their studies were almost three times more likely to begin their careers as managers than those who were not involved in such activities (Tchibozo & Pasteur, 2007). However, in an era of self-proclaimed

“lazy” college students with busy schedules, it can be difficult to motivate these students to volunteer their time and receive the recommended experience outside of the classroom.

Motivating college students is a struggle that both authors are going to face following graduation. Meagan Mullen plans to go into Student Affairs and Higher Education, with hopes in becoming a Residence Hall Director for the beginning of her career. With such close proximity to students, Mullen will have the chance to advise and mentor student leaders and residents. As discussed previously, students are not always motivated to become involved and continue personal and professional development because of their already busy schedules, but Mullen thinks it is important to encourage students to do so.

Max Browning plans to work in youth marketing for a nonprofit organization. Through this line of work, he will be required to persuade busy university students to find spare time to devote towards his organization. Because Browning will not be in direct contact with many of the university students that he will be marketing towards, he needs to understand the communication skills necessary in motivating these students. While college students are busy, they still need experience within the community that can be drawn upon to motivate them.

Previous research has been conducted to examine both in-class and volunteer motivation among college students; however, this research lacks the connection between motivation to volunteer and supervisory communication. Following an in depth review of the current literature surrounding the motivation of college students, Mullen and Browning aim to create a research proposal to fill the gap prevalent in the literature.

Literature Review

Volunteerism for Advancement

Scholars have been studying the act of volunteering for decades. It can be difficult to understand the concept of doing work for no pay or compensation, when the work of volunteers is often very difficult and possibly more strenuous than some careers. Volunteering is thought of as a selfless act to give back to the community, but there can be hidden motives behind volunteering. According to Holdsworth and Brewis (2014), volunteering has been stressed in young people, encouraging them to use it as a way to “develop skills and enhance employability profiles” (Holdsworth & Brewis, 2014, p. 204). For the purposes of our research, we have conceptualized volunteering as any act performed for no payment or academic credit. This can include completing community service or joining a student organization.

The volunteer rate in college students has been going up more rapidly than the average rate of volunteering in the general public (Brunell, et. al., 2014). College students are motivated to volunteer through many factors, such as altruism, professional or academic advancement, and enjoyment (Luping, 2001). While altruism and enjoyment are becoming less motivational, professional and academic advancement have become the leading motivators in volunteer work within college students (Brunell, Buelow, & Tumblin, 2014). Altruism and enjoyment are seen as secondary benefits received from volunteering; the real benefit is the signal students send to institutions, both academic and professional, when they volunteer.

Because volunteering can be considered any work done without payment, researchers Ghose and Kassam (2014) conceptualized the forms of volunteering as informal, formal, and a mixture of the two in a study conducted in India. Informal volunteering is unstructured and takes place outside of nonprofit organizations; formal volunteering is the form in which volunteers are

systematically organized and work within a nonprofit organization; a mix of both forms includes volunteers who are unstructured but work within a nonprofit organization. This study found that socioeconomic status played a large role in determining which type of volunteering was performed by an individual student. Upper- and lower-class students often times volunteered formally, in contrast to middle-class students, who usually volunteered informally or with the hybrid model (Ghose & Kassam, 2014).

This is significant because motivation within these different socioeconomic levels changed between academic self-interest and professional self-interest. Upper- and lower-class students were more interested in academic success, and middle-class students were motivated by professional advancement (Ghose & Kassam, 2014). This implies educational institutions prefer formal volunteering, and professional institutions accept more informal forms of volunteering. Moore, Warta, and Erichsen (2014) stated that it is “almost self-evident that students will gain an advantage in the labour market through their involvement in activities outside of their studies” (p. 207). This implies it is crucial for students looking for advancement in either the workforce or in education volunteer.

In the discussion section of the Ghose and Kassam findings, the authors suggested that students who are in the middle-class are more interested in gaining skills for their career, whereas students who are of a higher class will continue to gain education instead of moving on to the work force. Students who are of a lower class might be volunteering to signal to scholarship providers who might offer financial aid (Ghose & Kassam, 2014). This is important to consider because college students are working now more than ever to be recognized by institutions--whether those institutions be academic or career related.

However, not everyone considers volunteering relevant for their advancement, which raises the question: Who is more likely to volunteer? This was the topic of discussion in the study by Moore et. al. (2014) in which they investigated volunteer motivations and the likelihood of volunteering within specific demographics. They found that while many personal traits were not important factors in determining likelihood of volunteering, students who are a member of an organization that requires volunteer hours--such as a fraternity or sorority--are more likely to volunteer than those who are not in these types of organizations. Because students are primarily volunteering for advancement, it can be assumed these students are also taking other actions to further their personal and professional development. According to a study conducted by Ostrom-Blonigen, Bornsen, Larson-Casselton, and Erickson (2010), "leadership training programs typically occur on campus through coursework or within student organizations" (p. 249). This suggests that joining such organizations that require volunteer hours and leadership training may be the most beneficial in producing a skilled and prepared student ready for the work force.

As previously mentioned, not all college students are interested in joining these organizations or taking the opportunities presented to them. Some students gain this motivation to further their academic and professional interests, yet others do not. In the next section, we discuss the factors that influence how and why people become motivated.

Student Motivational Patterns

Despite all of the benefits and skills gained from volunteering, as are described above, these are not returned without the student's motivation to do so. With college students describing themselves as lazy, this can be easier said than done. Similar to the conceptual definitions described in other articles, we will be defining motivation as a willingness to act upon what one sees as the best course of action (Kaplan, Crockett, and Tivnan, 2014). While college

students self-identify as lazy, understanding the motivational tendencies of a college student will help increase their willingness to act.

In a study conducted by Kaplan, et. al. (2014), college students were studied to gain a deeper understanding of their moral motivation based on the Kohlberg's six stages of moral development. While it is often portrayed that moral development through Kohlberg's stages are sequential, Kaplan et. al. suggest that students may waver between their present stage and lower stages depending on the situation. The hypothetical situations portrayed in this study reflected the hypothetical scenarios employed by Kohlberg. These situations often require the reader to make a decision based on whether he or she would respect the law or defy public authority in order to save a human life.

Motivation activation towards illegal activity was also studied through student responses to images of socially discouraged behaviors. While Kaplan et. al. studied the relationship between motivation to hypothetical situations, Lang and Yeghyan (2011) looked into how different personality types elicit different responses to the images of taboo products. They found that students with high approach system activation elicit higher levels of motivation activation (p. 1081). These higher levels of motivation activation elicit positive responses from the students; therefore, there is likely a similar response happening with students in the Kaplan, Crockett, and Tivnan study. In this study, many students provided responses within stages five and six of moral development. Because the hypothetical situations contain both illegal and risky behaviors, the students may have been more motivated than normal to act upon the situation.

However, it not nearly enough to examine only a student's motivation in a given situation. Self-efficacy is also an important factor when determining how likely someone will act upon a certain situation. Judge, Erez and Bono (1998) defined self-efficacy as "an

individual's perception of their ability to perform across a variety of situations" (p. 170).

Despite the students' high moral motivations in the Kaplan et. al. study, without a high self-efficacy, these students may not feel capable of creating the changes they desire. When individuals are high in self-efficacy, they attack problems as challenges and are less likely to feel that they cannot complete the task at hand (Madonna & Philpot, 2013); therefore, a motivation to act is only one step in the process. If a student does not believe that he or she possesses the necessary skills to complete a task, then no level of motivation will cause action to occur.

Another study, conducted by Roets, Van Hiel, and Kruglanski (2013) included relevance in volunteer motivation. They suggested that people are more motivated if the information they receive is perceived as relevant (Roets, Van Hiel, and Kruglanski, 2013). This reinforces the idea that students are only interested in activities they find interesting or advantageous. With so many college students communicating that they are either too busy for outside activities or that they are simply too lazy, it can be difficult to motivate them into volunteering; however, there must be communication tactics in which a supervisor can increase a student's willingness to volunteer.

Supervisory Communication

When it comes to motivating students to act, much influence can be given to the student by a superior such as a professor or advisor. Because a student likely has frequent contact with many of their superiors, figuring out a communication strategy to increase student motivation is critical for supervisors. Supervisory communication includes any message from a supervisor to a student. Based on the conceptual definition of "mentor" provided by Wrench and Punyanunt (2004), supervisory communication will be referred to as a dialogue, "where one individual with more knowledge and experience aids another individual who has less knowledge and

experience” (p. 224). Present literature describes several important factors regarding effective communication between supervisors and students.

There are many situations in which a supervisor-supervisee relationship is created and maintained in a college setting. For those living on campus, a Resident Assistant would be the most direct supervisor, with a type of Residence Hall Director being above them. In classrooms, instructors and teaching assistants would be considered supervisors; other academic supervisors include deans, academic counselors, and upperclassmen within the department. College students are provided with a plethora of supervisors, and therefore retain the opportunity to create an abundance of mentoring relationships.

Wrench and Punyanunt stated that “the ideal advisee-advisor relationship is one that focuses on building a mentoring relationship” (p. 226). Developing relationships between supervisors and students is important in creating trust and influence within the relationship. Including a context of a warm, caring relationship is important in building credibility (Jang, 2008). Credibility provides a solid foundation on which motivation can be constructed by the advisor.

This relationship is also crucial to having students initiate a dialogue with their instructors. While much of this communication will occur in a face-to-face setting, possibly the most important supervisory communication occurs outside of the classroom setting. According to a study conducted by Myers, Martin, and Knapp (2005), when students perceive the use of ego support by instructors, the students are more likely to initiate a conversation with their instructor outside of the classroom (p. 443). Ego support is defined as the ability to “make other people feel good about themselves” (p. 444). This means if a professor can make students feel pleasant, he or she seems more approachable.

Another trait crucial to supervisors when communicating with their students is humor. When asking students to describe situations in which they felt an instructor's behavior conveyed transformational leadership, 13 percent of students in one study described a time in which the instructor utilized humor (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011, p. 13). The ability for a supervisor to communicate leadership skills to a student is critically important when working to motivate a student to be involved. Likewise, humor was also found to convey the relevance of a topic towards students. In a different study, students were asked to describe a time in which they felt an instructor clearly communicated the relevance of the material. Eleven percent of these students cited an example of a time when the instructor's teaching style evoked humor, thus making the material appear more relevant to them (Muddiman & Frymier, 2009, p. 136). If a student does not understand the relevance of a task, then it may be difficult to motivate them towards acting in the first place.

Continuation of Current Research

Although current research effectively details volunteerism in, motivation of, and supervisory communication with college students, no previous studies have looked into the relationship present between the three variables. It is critically important that college students gain the skills associated with volunteering; therefore, research must be conducted regarding the link between increasing motivation to volunteer through supervisory communication.

Research Question 1: Which supervisory communication strategies do students perceive as increasing their motivation to volunteer?

One major gap in the present literature is the reliance on instructor communication patterns towards students. Though instructor communication patterns are likely similar to those of other student advisors, our proposal aims to expand the present research. While instructor

communication aims to teach students required materials to pass a class, other advisors are able to develop a student's hard and soft skills for the workforce. Every student has the ability to gain these skills through volunteering; however, many students will not be self-motivated to volunteer.

Likewise, multiple studies' findings suggest that how an instructor communicates ideas and expectations are just as important as the content. Samfira and Faragau-Drăgos (2014) found that "response to nonverbal and para-verbal indices of a message is five times higher than in verbal indices" (p. 192). This means that people pay more attention to how a person is positioned, eye contact, vocal changes, etc. than what a person is saying. Finally, while many studies have been conducted to examine relevance within volunteerism, motivation, and supervisory communication individually, few have discussed the relationship of relevance with all three variables combined. As stated in the literature review, relevance has been found to increase motivation and volunteering is found to be relevant.

Hypothesis 1: Student motivation to volunteer will increase as supervisory communication conveys the relevance of volunteering.

Methods

Study 1: Qualitative

Participants

For this study, we want to recruit college undergraduate and graduate students of varying grade levels and faculty and staff members from a variety of departments at three large, Midwestern universities. These universities will not only provide a diverse population of participants, but also a comparative representation of the populations that both authors will be interacting with in their future careers. Because generalizability is less important in qualitative research, we will go with a small sample size. We will be conducting focus groups, ideally between 3-5 student groups and 2-4 advisor groups, with about 8 participants in each group. This will encourage intimate conversation between the group members and facilitators. We will aim to recruit about 50 students and 40 advisors, to prepare for the dilemma of some not attending their focus group. The primary questions for the focus groups can be found in Appendix A. Probing questions will be asked sparingly at the discretion of the moderator.

In determining our participants for the study, we were concerned that offering incentives would hinder the results. On the contrary, a study conducted by Omori and Feldhaus (2015) discovered that “offering extra-credit will not jeopardize survey results, data quality, and efficiency of data collection” (p. 21). Therefore, we will work with instructors to provide extra credit to students who participate in our study.

To better understand the effects of communication within many areas of study, we will offer the survey to students in at least one course in every college at each university, as to gain information from a variety of majors. As for supervisors, we will offer the focus groups to all university faculty who work from campus and have had a mentoring relationship with a student

within the past 2 years. We do not want to offer focus group spots to faculty who work primarily from home or who have not mentored a student recently.

Procedure

Both student and supervisor groups will be facilitated by either Browning or Mullen. We will facilitate the session to probe deeper into interesting answers and gain more insight from nonverbal cues when members discussed their experiences. We will provide an introduction to the group, stating a brief outline of the focus groups and that all stories will remain confidential. We will be collecting demographic information via handouts with the following information: name, sex, year in school, university, and major. However, no identifying information will be used in the discussion of the study without consent of the participant. All participants will have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and then sign a waiver that states they understand the instructions and give informed consent to proceed with the study.

The focus groups will only meet once for an hour long session in a meeting room on their respective campuses. The student groups will discuss personal mentoring relationships in which they were being mentored and describe times in which communication was motivational and times in which it was not motivational. The supervisor groups will discuss personal mentoring relationships in which they mentored a student and describe tactics they use to provide more motivation for students. Responses will be audio-recorded for later analysis, along with field notes taken by Browning and Mullen on observations in nonverbal communication. Additionally, conversations from the focus groups will be transcribed within 24 hours of the conclusion of the meetings.

Analyses

After completing all of the focus groups, Browning and Mullen will write analytical memos to determine first impressions on the data, such as observed themes. After themes are discovered, we will reread through the data to find all data providing evidence for these themes. When a situation is described in which student motivation increased based on supervisory communication, the example will be categorized with other descriptions of similar nature. In order to unitize the qualitative data to determine which communication strategies best increase student motivation to volunteer, we will be looking at the frequency counts for each strategy. The more frequently a communication strategy is mentioned during the focus group interviews, the higher its frequency count will become; therefore, it will be concluded that these communication strategies are more effective at increasing motivation.

To check the accuracy of the data, we will have member reflections for each of the participants. We also want to get the opinion of colleagues by having them read over our analysis of the study. For example, we will offer a variety of participant responses and proposed categories to see if other researchers code the results in a similar nature as us. This will create more soundness in the findings. We will use short quotes from the focus groups to explain different themes within our discussion of the findings.

Study 2: Quantitative**Participants**

In an effort to produce generalizable results, we would like to have a fairly large sample size for this study. Our study will consist of 250 undergraduate and graduate students of varying grade levels. These participants will be selected from three different large Midwestern

universities, similar to the participants in our qualitative study, to include an analogous demographic.

We will recruit these students in the same fashion as with our qualitative study; we will offer an incentive to those who participate in the survey. Because the survey is much quicker and more convenient than partaking in a focus group, we thought it best that we involve a smaller incentive. Our incentive will be entrance into a raffle for a gift card to a short list of restaurants. All participants will have the option to give their name and contact information at the end of the survey to be entered into the raffle, and three will be chosen at random to receive a gift card.

As with the qualitative study, we will be offering the survey to students in at least one class in each college within the university, preferably more. Even though this sampling technique is not random, it is much more convenient and will provide us with a broad spectrum of student-advisor relationships.

Procedures

The survey will consist of 15 questions and will be sent to students via email. These 15 questions will include two basic demographic questions followed by 13 Likert scales. The exact questions can be seen in Appendix B. Although the method of survey dispersion will create a volunteer bias, it gives all students within the course the option to take the survey. In addition, participants will feel less pressure to give responses that fall into social desirability bias. The survey will have an introductory page where all instructions will be given. Before they proceed with the anonymous survey, participants will be asked to check a box stating they have read the instructions and give informed consent to the facilitators to include their responses in the study. The variables being tested are supervisory communication and student motivation to volunteer.

Analyses

After 3 weeks of allowing participants to complete the survey, we will collect the data and begin our analysis. Each question in the survey aims to identify whether or not there exists a correlation between supervisory communication of relevance and a student's motivation to volunteer; therefore, an analysis of association will be run to determine the correlation coefficient. Because data is being gathered through Likert scales, we will be able to discover the Pearson product-moment correlation. With the exception of items 5 and 9, each question is framed in such a way that a high agreeance with the statement correlates with a positive relationship between the variables. Items 5 and 9 have been reversed scored to help identify surveys with set bias. Once this correlation value has been identified, we will be able to identify not only the potential relationship between our two present variables, but also the apparent strength of the correlation. In order for us to fail to reject our hypothesis, we expect to find a correlation coefficient value of above a 0.7. This value would indicate a strong, positive relationship between an supervisor's communication of relevance and a student's motivation toward the supervisor's request.

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Appendix A

Questions for focus groups:

For student groups:

- Describe your relationship with supervisors at your institution.
- Describe a time in which a supervisor has successfully motivated you.
- Describe a time in which a supervisor has unsuccessfully motivated you.
- How do you prefer a supervisor to communicate with you?
- What gaps, if any, do you believe are present in your communication with your supervisors?

For supervisor groups:

- Describe your ideal relationship with students at your institution.
- Describe a time in which you have successfully motivated a student.
- Describe a time in which you have unsuccessfully motivated a student.
- How do you prefer to communicate with your students?

What gaps, if any, do you believe are present in your communication with your students?



Appendix B

Quantitative Survey:

[Page One of Survey] Demographic questions:

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. What year in school are you?
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Fifth Year
 - f. Sixth Year
 - g. Graduate Student

[Page Two of Survey] Likert Scale questions:

For the following section, mark how well you agree with the given statement.

3. I prefer supervisors to communicate the relevance of an opportunity.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
4. When a supervisor communicates the relevance of an opportunity, I feel more motivated.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
5. *The relevance of an opportunity does not affect my motivation to participate.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

6. When supervisors communicate in a friendly and genuine manner, then I feel more motivated to participate.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
7. My supervisors can motivate me.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
8. I feel motivated when my supervisors communicate with me like friends.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
9. *Communication from my supervisors should be specific even at the risk of sounding harsh.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
10. I would be more likely to volunteer if I felt it was relevant to my life.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
11. I am more willing to participate in my supervisor's events when I understand how they relate to my life.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
12. If someone does not communicate why something is important to me, then I am less inclined to act upon it.

- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
13. If nobody communicates the purpose of something to me, then I am less desired to do it.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
14. My interest in an opportunity is linked to the applicability it has in my life.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
15. Supervisors possess the ability to improve my desire to take an opportunity.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

*Items 5 and 9 will be reversed scored.

What is an Advisor?

An Autoethnography of the Advising Styles in Student Government

Meagan Mullen

Ball State University

What is An Advisor? An Autoethnography of the Advising Styles in Student Government

I currently serve as the Ball State University Student Government Association (SGA) Treasurer. In the past year, SGA has had three separate advisors, and each has provided their own personality into the organization. This is an autoethnography of my experience with SGA and the effect advisors have on the organization.

I chose to work through these relationships in an autoethnography because it is a form of study which insights empathy and understanding. Advisors are human, and as humans they are each unique with a collection of characteristics that is matched by no other. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), "autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways a personal experience influences the research process," which I interpret to mean each interaction can spin the research process in a different direction. Another study, conducted by Custer (2014), states that autoethnography "explores an individual's unique life experiences in a relationship," (p. 1). With such a dependent topic--advisors and how their advising styles affect their organization--autoethnography is a great way to see the particular characteristics from each individual.

In this study, I seek to explore the traits shown by three separate advisors for SGA. The first is Jennifer Jones-Hall, who advised the organization for almost five years. Next is Kevin Carey, who worked as the Graduate Assistant for SGA and then the interim advisor from Spring 2015 to Fall 2015. Last is Melissa Ginotti, who was hired in November 2015. After analyzing the characteristics and how they affected the organization, I will reflect on my own traits and predict my advising styles, seeing as I will be pursuing a career in Student Affairs.

Some important characters in the following stories are the three advisors--Jennifer Jones-Hall, Kevin Carey, Melissa Ginotti--along with other people involved in the organization. Jack Hesser is the current president of SGA, but is also a very close friend of mine. He and I had

planned to run for office together our sophomore year. Lauren Berger is the Assistant Director of the Office of Student Life and oversees the Leadership Studies minor, as well as teaches some of the Leadership courses. Mary Osbourne is the current graduate assistant for SGA and oversees my Co-Sponsorship Committee along with assists the advisor. Dr. Gibson is the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and indirectly oversaw SGA during the transition between Jennifer and Melissa. Emily Halley is the upcoming SGA Treasurer and has been working with me on her transition.

Jennifer Jones-Hall

In the Office - Spring 2013

“You’ll need to have your outfit approved by Jennifer Jones-Hall,” said the email, inviting me to President Gora’s dinner. I walk into the Office of Student Life in my heels and skirt, ready to prove myself to this women with whom I’ve had very little interaction. I’m intimidated by this woman, although I’m unsure why. I haven’t been given any reason to fear her, but yet I still do. I know she is high up in the Office of Student Life, and I know Jack talks about her nonstop; she is his advisor in Student Government Association. But because SGA was overwhelming and too formal for me, I assumed she was as well.

These thoughts race through my head as I walk towards the back of the office towards her door. As I enter, I knock on the door and she looks up from her computer with a glowing smile. Instantly, I feel better about this woman. The office isn’t dark and scary as I had imagined, but rather bright and full of pictures and mementos. You can really tell she’s put a lot of effort and care into the people in the pictures. “Come on in!” Jennifer welcomes me and gestures for me to sit in the chair opposite her desk.

To begin the intimidation, this woman needed to “approve” my clothes for a dinner! Of course I was scared; I thought she would rip my outfit to shreds and tell me I didn’t know how to dress myself. This wasn’t the case, but that’s the expectation set when a student is told their outfit needs to be “approved.”

Nonverbals matter just as much if not more than verbal communication; the smile, the friendly eyes, and the open-looking body language was enough to calm any nerves I might have collected. Another important aspect is the environment. Bright enough, homey, and just enough personal touch to feel unique; this is a space that welcomes people.

In an Interview - Fall 2014

I’m observing Student Government Association because of a class project, and I need to interview people from the organization. I decide to interview Jennifer because she has more experience than anyone in the organization and would provide great insight from her experiences with Ball State’s SGA. I have a healthy, playful relationship with Jennifer; she knows who I am, but we don’t interact enough to have any tension or close bonding. She knows me mostly through Jack.

I walk into the office and she welcomes me warmly. I open up with some small talk about the weather, but then dive right into questions regarding SGA and Jennifer’s history with the organization. She tells me about the organization and its purpose, but then goes straight into the relationship between the executive board and the student senators. I notice her attention to each person in the organization; she can tell you names of individuals and their accomplishments, even years later. I ask, “What differences do you see, from four years ago to now?” Jennifer brings up the relationship between the executive board and the student senators again, stating

that the relationship is much more civil now than it was four years ago. She also refers to this year's Senate and says they've produced more work than any year before them.

"I enjoy going to Senate each week, but I'm still a little intimidated to proxy for Jack," I disclose towards the end of our interview. We discuss the intensity of the senators, which can be scary for a newcomer. I compare SGA to the Residence Hall Association, of which I am the treasurer: "RHA still uses parli pro, but we are more relaxed about it." She says she hopes to improve the perception of SGA on campus and become more visible.

She might be a little critical of her organization, but we begin talking about executive slates and elections, and she brightens up. "Each year ends up positively," she claims as she looks up at the pictures in her office. She refers to each of the slates she's worked with and names all of the members. I feel a sense of warmth and deep care towards these students from her. I leave the interview with a few witty comments about this year's election, as she knows I will be running with Jack in just a few months.

Jennifer "knows who I am" because I've planned to run on an SGA slate with Jack Hesser, seemingly one of her favorite senators. She understands the hidden agenda behind the project; I'm studying SGA to get a better feel for how I can improve it once I'm in office. It seems shady and unethical, but honestly I could learn a lot from the analysis of the organization of which I plan on being involved.

She seems very knowledgeable on the organization and is very proud to represent SGA. She does hint at some annoyances during her interview, but overall she speaks positively about the organization. She seems excited and at the same time not excited for the upcoming election season for SGA; there's a history of drama during election season. Last year was quiet, but my

freshman year was a big to-do. People were slandering other slates, fake Twitter accounts were made to bash one another, and students were being harassed to vote.

Jennifer is respected and trusted as an advisor because she knows what she's doing. She's been the advisor for four years and has been in Student Affairs for far longer than that. People are intimidated by her knowledge of the university system; she knows the ins and outs of how to make real change.

In Class - Spring 2015

I walk into class, ready to give a presentation on Snapchat, an application for smartphones created by two college students before they graduated. As I enter, everyone is chatting and preparing for class to begin. I set up my presentation, sit in my seat, and wait for Jennifer Jones-Hall to come in. When she arrives, everyone is still mingling, and some turn to greet her. She smiles and gives us a big, "Hello!" before sitting off to the side in a chair.

She pulls out her notebook and is ready for class to begin. My classmates and I quiet down to hear her speak before presentations. She gives us a few words of welcome, outlines today's class, and opens the floor up to whoever wants to present first.

During my presentation, I begin with the idea that technology can impact our leadership and experiences in different involvements in our lives. I introduce my technology and explain how it can be used in student organizations. During my presentation, I often look to Jennifer to analyze her nonverbals. She smiles and leans in during my presentation, as if to show interest in the topic. When it comes time to show the examples of Snapchat, Jennifer gets her phone out and tries to download the app.

After my presentation, I open the floor up to questions, and a few of my classmates raise their hands. I answer each question, and then look to Jennifer for any final thoughts. She grins

and thanks me for having such a bright presentation, and I sit down to listen to the next presentation.

Class with Jennifer seemed formal yet so informal. We would read the chapter and then instead of a lecture or assignment, we just talked about how the concepts could influence our leadership. We brought up world leaders, national leaders, and campus leaders. It was very fun and lighthearted, and the students were disciplined enough to take the class seriously without being told to do so.

Reflection

Jennifer was very kind and cared deeply for her students, but she was a very serious-minded person. She most often faced questions in Senate with a serious tone, and she seemed knowledgeable on most topics. Many people trusted her based on her knowledge and expertise, which her the go-to person when a senator had a question. To my knowledge, the executive board was utilized less to answer questions when Jennifer was around.

What the biggest challenge having Jennifer as an advisor was the lack of transparency when it came to situations. Jennifer always talked about a disconnect between the senators and the executive board, and I think that she might have had something to do with it. It can be difficult advising so many moving parts; Dalgrehn (2015) states that, "accountability of student leaders may be one of the most challenging aspects of working with student organizations," (p. 5). There should be a larger push from the advisor to connect these parts of the organization.

Kevin CareyIn Our Transition - Spring 2015

I am sitting at the desk in Park, frantically checking an email. It reads:

Hello Everyone,

I would love to set up a meeting next week to continue the conversation's JJH was having with you all. Please know I am here at a resource and will do everything I can to support y'all! Please fill out the link below! I hope you have a wonderful weekend.

<http://doodle.com/fqvhdmxcrtnq>

KC

Kevin M. Carey
Graduate Assistant- Greek Life
Office of Student Life

I am so glad Kevin Carey wants to meet with us as a group, because I've been working on the budget presentation and I'm a little panicked about it. Thoughts race through my head: "What if I mess up, will we not receive as much money?" "How will we afford all of our points?" "If we can't afford them, they won't get done, and it'll be all my fault."

I also am a little distraught by the sudden change in advisors. Kevin is still a grad student, and hasn't been involved in SGA as much as Jennifer was! How can we both be new to this and not mess something up? I go back to the budget and fill in more numbers. I've been asking for numbers from all my slate members for about a week. I hope I'll get this done before my presentation.

The transition between Jennifer and Kevin was a bumpy one. There were some discrepancies about an award winner who used to own a confederate flag. Several students felt it was unbelievable and went to great heights to let the rest of the university know how they felt. As an advisor of a very influential student organization, Jennifer decided to warn the executive board not to get involved because they represent the entire student population, not just their

opinions. An email was found from her stating something similar to, "don't bite the hand that feeds you." She then abruptly resigned in the middle of the semester.

Kevin was the graduate assistant assigned to SGA, and immediately had to pick up the slack because Jennifer was no longer around. With a new executive board in place, a budget proposal to review, and the stress of finishing graduate school in a month, Kevin was probably a bit overwhelmed by the situation. It was emotional, high-stress, and downright ugly for a lot of people.

However, Kevin handled the situation very well. As seen above, he steps up and meets with the board to discuss how we'd like to proceed. With unwavering support, Kevin helps us reach the end of the semester smoothly while also successfully graduating and accepting a full-time position at Ball State. He is to act as our interim advisor until the position can be filled.

On the Phone - Summer 2015

I leave the Housing Business Office and head to my room back at Towers to wait for the call. It's almost 10 am in San Francisco--where I'm working--which means it's almost 1 pm back in Muncie. I get to my room and gather my paperwork for SGA. I grab my laptop and plop onto my bed before opening it. I open the budget for SGA, Facebook, and my email. I finally get a call from a 765 number, which is comfortable and familiar.

I answer the call and am happy to hear the voice on the other line: "Hello Meagan! How have you been lately?" Kevin and I chat for a few minutes about the summer, my time in San Francisco, and his transition into a Student Affairs professional. Then, we go into business. We talk about the platform, the budget, updates on spending, etc. All goes well, but I have a heavy thought resting in my mind.

I bring up my Honors Thesis to Kevin. I tell him about my advisor retiring from Ball State, and how it's going to be hard to plan my small groups for the fall without an advisor, as well as being in California instead of Indiana. He talks me through some options, and then offers support at any time during the process. I tell him I'm going to call Lauren Berger to discuss the ordeal, and he perks up: "That's a great idea!" He wishes me well, and we both hang up the phone.

I found out I was moving to San Francisco for the summer in the middle of the spring semester, but I didn't even think about how that might affect my ability to work on SGA stuff. I moved to my new home, of which I was extremely nervous, in May. My first thesis advisor retired that same month. I reached out to a few other partners for the project, and they all said they couldn't help because there wasn't a point person for the project. What I think they meant was, "We don't think you can do this, so we're backing out to save ourselves."

I had reached out to Kevin for some program ideas to help with my work in San Francisco, but then the situation mentioned above occurred. He wanted to talk about the platform points I'd been working on, and so I thought it was the opportune time to vent about my thesis. He seems very supportive, but I can tell he doesn't know how to help. When I mention getting a second opinion from Lauren, with whom he's worked very closely, he agrees.

In a Meeting - Fall 2015

I walk into the office at 7:50 am on a Monday, neither awake nor ready to talk about anything. Jack is sitting at the table looking very bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, which makes me want to turn around and crawl right back into my bed. I put my stuff by my desk and bring a chair to the table. Others file in and at 8 am, we begin the meeting.

There are only eight of us at this meeting because it doesn't include the full cabinet. We go through our agenda, and then we open up for reports. Jack continues to speak, seeing as he runs the meeting and also gives the first report. The rest of the executive board gives our short but sweet two cents and then we move to advisor reports.

Kevin starts by asking for an update to be sent to him; he wants to send it up to Dr. Gibson, who I've only met once, I think. Kevin also gives some updates on some current events on campus, and finishes with some good thoughts to keep in mind. We all pack up, and I stop Kevin to ask if I'll be meeting with him at any point. He offers to set something up and asks me to email him.

Kevin is very supportive, but he was never very interested in Student Government. He was only our interim advisor, after all. It was hoped to have a new advisor hired over the summer, but the university was still conducting interviews into the fall semester. Kevin was actually supposed to report all SGA activity to Dr. Gibson, who was also acting as an interim advisor. Kevin was a supportive advisor but we could tell this wasn't a passion of his.

We hired a new Director of Student Life and Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs in October and she started in November. She was coming all the way from California, which seemed so interesting to me, seeing as I had just been living out there not too long ago.

Reflection

Kevin was thrown into the position of SGA advisor partway through Spring 2015, and therefore was never officially trained for the position. According to Dahlgren, "advisors do not receive much training and often learn through trial and error," (p. 5); this is very true in Kevin's case because he was never taught how to advise SGA before being thrust into the position. His

passions for Student Affairs lie with Greek Life, and while he put his best into the position, he was never 100 percent dedicated to SGA.

Because Kevin wasn't as informed on the inner workings of Ball State or SGA, senators started coming to Jack and the rest of the executive board with questions instead of the advisor. According to Miles (2011)--a researcher who interviewed student government presidents regarding their advisors--students "depend on their advisor's knowledge of the institution and the student government association." Kevin wasn't fully equipped with this knowledge, but Jack had been serving on SGA for three years, going onto his fourth. This created a stronger connection between the two parties, which is a big step towards improvement in the organization.

Miles also discovered that students look to their advisors for motivation, which Kevin was great at. He was very supportive of the executive board and always looked for ways to provide energy.

Melissa Ginotti

In Line at Starbucks - Fall 2015

I rush to the end of the line at Starbucks, ready to order more than one drink with my plethora of Dining Plus. I contemplate what I might order for myself as I wait, and as I reach the counter I decide on sweet black tea--my favorite cold drink. I order the drinks, pay, and then go to the opposite counter to wait for my order.

I think about the agenda for Senate; we are welcoming our new advisor today! I wonder what Melissa Ginotti is like, and then I notice a woman I've never seen before. She's dressed in a green skirt suit and looks new to campus. She walks towards me to wait for her drink, and I greet her.

“Hello, how are you today?” I open with a generic line, because it might not be Melissa. She responds and we chat for a minute, and then I bring up Senate. She brightens up and admits that she didn’t even know which room she was supposed to go to, so I walk with her upstairs and welcome her to Cardinal Hall B, SGA’s home on Wednesdays.

I had no idea the woman at Starbucks was Melissa until we started talking, and once I found out, I thought, “Wow what a great way to meet someone who’s going to be your advisor for the rest of the year. Way to go, Meagan.” However, it was a very informal meeting, and my relationship with Melissa is reflective of that first introduction.

Melissa wasn’t afraid to ask questions or reach out to someone new in a strange place, even if that someone was in no way correlated to why she was here. It just so happens that I was!

During the Retreat - Spring 2016

I walk into Cardinal Hall B ready for my job as a tour guide. I start with my first group of senators and lead them to the Office of Student Life. I introduce them to Mary, who is sitting in the lobby. After Mary gives her spiel about being the graduate assistant for SGA, I lead the group towards Melissa’s office. I greet Stacey and nod towards her, hinting that they should do the same. They all say hello and follow me past the desk.

I lead the group into the small room and encourage them to all squeeze in. I stand in the doorway listening to the unscripted speech Melissa gives to the senators. She talks about motivation and how this semester should mean just as much as the last semester; she doesn’t want them to give up and stop working. As she finishes, I gather the group and lead them to the office. I direct all of the other groups to their respective locations and sit in the lobby of OSL as Austin takes the next group to Melissa’s office.

My last group follows me back to Melissa's office, again greeting Stacey as we walk by her desk. The senators squeeze into the office and Melissa begins her speech. It's been a little different each time, seeing as it wasn't scripted and she wants it to seem genuine, but this time she starts to get emotional. She starts tearing up and I notice her voice quivering. I feel bad at first because no one likes to cry in front of others, but then I start to get a little teary-eyed because she sounds so passionate about an organization she just started advising.

As we leave I wave at Melissa and let her know that was the last group. She smiles and looks up at me; her eyes are still glistening like they could dump any minute.

Throughout the transition process, I noticed a difference within Melissa. I sensed more emotion and approachability in Melissa, but the knowledge was not there. I felt like I was answering more questions than I was asking. However, Melissa seemed more emotionally involved in the organization; she empathized with our ups and downs.

This wasn't the first time I had seen Melissa cry; she teared up in meetings before. Nonetheless, I don't think any of the senators had ever seen her cry and it seemed to make them uncomfortable. I was uncomfortable at first, but then I realized why she was crying; she cares about this organization and the students within it and wants to see us continue to work instead of giving up halfway through the semester.

In a Meeting - Spring 2016

I walk into Melissa's office and lightly say, "Knock knock," as I enter. She greets me and I sit at the table near her desk. She's finishing up some work and lets me know she'll be ready in a minute. I pull up the budget for SGA and my notes for our meeting, as well as a pen to take more notes. I really want to make changes to the budget for next year, but I'm afraid I'll step on

the new treasurer's toes. I just know I didn't have the best suggestions for my budget, and I want to make sure the organization keeps moving forward.

Melissa comes to the table with a pad of paper and we begin the meeting. She brings up some paperwork I've never seen, and she offers to copy it so I can have it to take with me. After we return from the field trip to the copy machine, we begin going over my notes and brainstorming ideas for next year. Every idea I suggest comes with a nod of understanding from Melissa, and I feel respected. She gives me new ideas and I write them down, and at the end of the meeting I feel much better about being able to help more with the creation of next year's budget.

I let her know I'll be sending her a copy of the new budget with our recommended changes, and she smiles and thanks me. I leave the office, and I feel much lighter than when I was walking in the opposite direction.

Whenever I hear about Melissa working in the Office of Student Life, I always hear her ask questions about why we do things. "Why do we follow this process?" "Can we change it up to do this instead?" "Why don't we try this?" She's always looking to innovate each process, event, and organization. She revamped the Spring Activity Fair to be more interactive. She asked students for their opinions on the process to create a student organization. She sits and evaluates each platform point with us. She's looking to improve.

I wanted to make changes to the upcoming budget because I had some very good ideas, but I was afraid to bring them up because I didn't want to step on anyone's toes--especially Emily, the incoming treasurer. I wasn't transitioned as well as I could have been, so the budget wasn't the best it could have been. I want to improve the budget, which requires making changes to it, which requires stepping on toes. Melissa and I discussed a multitude of options for the

budget, and we decided on some that would benefit the organization but not harm the platform of the incoming executive board. She was open to my ideas and willing to hash them out until we had the best possible budget to present to Emily.

Reflection

Melissa is very new to the organization and to Ball State, so she has even less knowledge on the inner workings of both the institution and the organization than Kevin. The relationship between senators and the executive board was already stronger than most years, so senators would only come to Melissa as a last resort for answers. This might be helpful in the future, because it forces the executive board to work harder to answer questions.

Right from the beginning, Melissa always made it a point to make sure people felt comfortable and pleasant. A study conducted by Myers, Martin, & Knapp (2005) found that this was extremely helpful in motivating students; they noted that ego support increased the perception of an instructor's approachability. Ego support is defined by the researchers as the ability "to make other people feel good about themselves," (p. 444). The use of ego support makes students perceive the instructor as caring and responsive, which positively affects their likelihood of approaching them (p. 444). Melissa makes students want to visit her when they're struggling because she listens and empathizes with them.

Another observation is Melissa's ability to listen and critique new ideas. She's very open to creating new traditions or revisiting old ones, for which students are grateful. Miles notes this in the interviews conducted with presidents: "Students also appreciate when their advisors were creative and were willing to create new traditions." It's not uncommon for traditions to continue without being revisited for several years, which might make them outdated or lose value. Melissa is very open to change and revitalization of the organization.

Overall Reflection

Throughout the dialogues, I've noticed a few things. First, advisors typically influence those with whom they've had direct interaction. Example: Senators would interact with Jennifer more often than with Kevin and Melissa, and therefore they took on mannerisms and characteristics that she portrayed. Kevin and Melissa worked very closely with the executive board, but Kevin had so little time in Senate and Melissa hasn't established credibility with many senators yet, and therefore their influence is seen in the executive branch and not the legislative branch.

It's also interesting to note that the energy of the advisor sets the tone for the rest of the organization. Jennifer was much more serious-minded and therefore the organization focused on very serious tasks such as writing legislation and accomplishing platform points. Kevin was very inexperienced and therefore made up for it in support. That propelled the executive board to work on support and relationships in the organization instead of tasks. Melissa is a nice combination of the two previous advisors: She is very relaxed in her attitude and nonverbal communication, but she has goals for the organization and wants members to partake in accomplishing them.

Overall, in my opinion, the advisor has some influence over the organization, but not as much as they do on individual members. My experiences with each advisor has shaped my experience in SGA, but the culture as a whole hasn't changed entirely too much from advisor to advisor. I think there are more factors than just the advisor that influence the culture of a student organization.

Personal Reflection

As I am preparing for graduate school at Grand Valley State University, I think about my future in student affairs. I aspire to advise student organizations as a graduate student, and I wonder what my influence may be on the students I advise. As I've stated earlier, there are more factors than just the advisor that influence the culture of an organization, but advisors do influence the students around them.

My biggest strength is positivity, and I pride myself in being able to see the silver lining in most situations. It's important--to me, at least--that we keep an optimistic life view, because negativity seems to spread all too quickly and brings down the morale of a team. I've found it's harder to build trust and powerful relationships than it is to destroy them, and positivity has helped to keep many relationships intact for me. I hope to pass this optimistic viewpoint to others in my life, pointing out the bright side of a situation or helping to show the importance of positivity in a group.

I am a very empathetic person and have grown in my ability to empathize with others through reflection and guided mentorship. With this empathy comes a great strength in understanding others, but also a great weakness in being too accepting of justifications for mistakes. I have a tendency to completely trust others and fall into the trap of not keeping control of a person's responsibilities. I am completely aware that empathy can be a strength--compassion and recognition are important in mentoring and advising students--but I must also be aware that it could be taken too far.

My most important strength when thinking of advising is my ability to maximize other people's strengths. I value others' personalities and abilities within a team. Once I have the opportunity to learn about each team member individually, I am able to better shape and

understand the group's dynamic. I enjoy learning what someone desires in life, because if I can make whatever task they need to accomplish somehow benefit them, it'll make them much more likely to want to complete the task. I see myself analyzing individual members of an organization and setting them up for success by connecting strengths with corresponding responsibilities.

Conclusion

It is very difficult determining the characteristics of individuals that help create the culture of a student organization. There are many different influences, but the advisor helps to shape the members within the organization, and therefore shapes the organization itself. In this analysis of the Ball State University Student Government Association, each advisor brought something unique to the organization and its members. I have reflected on the interactions I have had with each advisor, as well as reflected on traits I possess that may affect future organizations I advise in the world of student affairs. We--meaning advisors--can only influence so many people, but the people we influence will continue to influence those around them in a ripple effect, and therefore we must do our best to act as positive influences and encourage others to do the same.

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